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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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THE UTILISATION OF FICTION IN THE TRAINING OF THE NURSE

Dear Editor: An interesting article by Agnes S. Ward, R.N., on "What We Owe to the Student Nurse," prompts me to set forth an opinion concerning an acknowledged weakness in the training of the average nurse, remedying which might also assist in a more desirable kind of publicity for the nursing profession, with a resultant much needed increase in recruits to our ranks.

Let me say distinctly at the outset that I do not speak as an authority on the training of nurses. I have not one qualification as such according to modern standards, but in fourteen years of postgraduate work, it has fallen to me on several occasions to "hold down" classes of student nurses, during periods of shortage or illness of instructors, and being unhampered by any traditions but my own, I was free to experiment and make observations on the methods which yielded me the richest results calculable in the interest of my students, and the incorporation of what they had learned in class into their daily work. It has been often a matter of amazement and regret to me, to peruse the class work of nurses under successive teachers and not find in any of it one single individualized note of either pupil or instructor—each lesson word for word from year to year.

For reason of conformity to State requirements, I had to adhere to certain subjects, but in their presentation the angle most applicable to needs and individuals was aimed at. Miss Ward speaks of the success which attended the lectures on "How to Dress." I used this idea largely in a course of lessons on Hygiene, meeting with great enthusiasm. But of all the classes with my students the one most fertile in its yield of mutual understanding, was an hour a week devoted by common consent to a discussion of current fiction (generally magazine) and the "movies" of the week at the local theatres.

Is it not true that it is primarily through the imagination that every nurse is recruited, and is not that the great appeal in our campaign?

The average instructor is satisfied to judge her student by the way she makes a bed or takes down a lecture, although it has been well proven that neither performance is an index that she is possessed of the essential qualities of a nurse, but once find a common ground calling for comprehension and expression, and a pretty accurate estimate of possibilities and limitations can be arrived at.

To anyone who doubts the enlightening value of the experiment, let her call for an opinion from a class of say twenty students, on a social problem as set forth by Theda Bara or Geraldine Farrar on the screen, or discuss the best short story of the month. We may exact and instil perfect uniformity in class room work, but instruct as you will, the girl who prefers Theda Bara and the Cosmopolitan, will neither attract nor take hold of life in the same exemplary manner as a devotee of the Symphony Orchestra and Mrs. Humphrey Ward, and it is folly to ignore these mental signposts.

The overwhelming significance of being literally pitched into an environment producing a tremendous emotional stimulation is frequently overlooked by those responsible for young nurses. Past the impressionable age themselves, they forget what it is like to be at the mercy of awakened emotions with no safety valve but microscopes and text books. I have heard women experienced in the work say that they had found morning prayers the only stabilizing influence needed in the school—I do not question, but I congratulate. In my experience I

have found nothing at all that was infallible in maintaining morale, but I unhesitatingly affirm that the nearest I have come to promoting confidence and frankness, was in the wholesome discussion of human situations as set forth in fiction.

Another advantage to be gained from recognizing the value of literary or dramatic topics, would be the removal of the objection held by so many, that "nurses can not talk of anything but their work." Perhaps we would even eliminate that age-old contention of parents, that they would never let their daughters enter training because "nurses grow so hard." I think it is because human relations are reduced to text book terms, sex is pathology, life and death mean obstetrics and the morgue.

Encourage the nurses to offset the mental encroachment of the class room by taking their instruction hand in hand with the best that is presented in the field of fiction. And for those who do not prefer the best, see that they are supplied with the best of the type they prefer. And above all, keep alive an interest in the domestic side of things, so that the classes about to graduate are attracted for a time at least, to the field of private duty. So shall we be represented in the home by those who are full of the enthusiasm of their school and who will act as our most powerful factor in presenting the worth of our calling in this environment, upon which, after all, we are dependent for our supply.

To quote Dr. Pfeiffer, "the profession of nursing must be relieved of its handicaps as compared with the other occupations." One of its handicaps has been a training inadequate to the demands of the student, that has been practically overcome or is safe to be so. The second is the other extreme—a training in which the imagination is sacrificed and as Sister Domitilla so truly says, "the theory is not related to the student's actual problems." Broaden Social Service with "Limehouse Nights," and vitalize Psychology a little with Conan Doyle—or John Barrymore's superb presentation of Dr. Jekyll on the screen. If the class or instructor is minus an interest in these things, it is the most illuminating fact of all, and God help them.

Cincinnati, O.

AGNES JAMES, R.N.

ONE MONTH FROM HIS WEDDING

Dear Editor: In a desperate case of duodenal ulcer, the patient was stricken with bowel hemorrhage, 5:30 a. m., June 2, and recovered sufficient strength to walk about his room June 26, and to be married July 2! The hemorrhage of June second was one quart of blood. The medication, neutralon every four hours. Nourishment was Nestle's Food and lentil soup, every three hours. Five other hemorrhages followed June third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh. Strong tea enemas, six ounces, were given every six hours. On June eighth there was no hemorrhage, and on June ninth the patient was decidedly stronger. June thirteenth nourishment was increased and there was digested defecation. On June sixteenth, as the patient was facing slow recovery, blood transfusion was administered, 500 c.c. by the citrate method. Slow reaction continued through thirty-four hours, the pulse being strong, averaging 56 to 58. On June twentieth full diet was restored, and two days later the patient sat up for ten minutes. On June twenty-sixth he was dressed and walked about his room, after which improvement increased amazingly, and the marriage, a long postponement of which had seemed probable but a short time before, was solemnized on July second.

New York

G. M.

JOURNALS ON HAND

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